

John Neilson House(Saratoga National Historic Park)  
Bemis Heights  
Stillwater  
Saratoga County  
New York

HABS No. NY-3317

HABS  
NY,  
46-BEMHI,  
1A-

PHOTOGRAPHS

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

ADDENDUM  
FOLLOWS.

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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JOHN NEILSON HOUSE HABS No. NY-3317  
(SARATOGA NATIONAL HISTORIC PARK)

Street Address or Location: Bemis Heights, Stillwater, Saratoga County, New York

Present Owner: National Park Service, U.S. Department of Interior, Saratoga National Historical Park, Stillwater, N. Y.

Present Occupant: Saratoga National Historical Park

Present Use: Interpretive Exhibit

Brief Statement of Significance: (architectural and historical)  
The John Neilson House is an important landmark for its historical association and as a type of house now very rare. Situated within the American entrenchments on the Saratoga battlefield, it served as the headquarters for the Generals Poor and Arnold during the Saratoga campaign. As a building it is representative of the early frontier settlements of the upper Hudson valley.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: John Neilson built and owned the house. By inheritance it passed to Charles Neilson, his son; William Neilson, grandson; Charles Neilson, great grandson, who sold the house to the State of New York in 1926.

2. Date of erection: Between 1775 and 1777.

3. Architect: Unknown

Builder, Suppliers, etc.: The house was presumably built by the owner, and the building material came from the neighborhood.

4. Original plans, construction etc.: There are no known plans of the house and considering its modest size presumably there never were any.

5. Notes on alterations and additions: An addition was made to the Neilson House adjoining the west wall sometime before 1830. A window was added to the east wall after the

addition and before 1848 and the interior was refinished during the same period. At an unknown date before 1880 the original fireplace was demolished. In 1895 the house was moved 24 feet north and the chimney and front porch was demolished. All the exterior finishes were replaced. In 1926 the house was moved 160 feet south to its present location and turned 90° from south to west; and once more all exterior finishes were replaced, a new fireplace and chimney was built and the interior finishes were repaired.

6. Important old views and references: The earliest view of the house known to exist is a field sketch made by Benson J. Lossing in 1848. The sketch is illustrated in Lossing's Book "Pictorial Field Book of the Revolution", Harper Brothers, New York, 1851. Photograph by unknown author 1889. Illustrated in "The Old Saratoga and Burgoyne Campaign" by William Ostrander, Schuylerville, N. Y. 1897, Library of Dorothy Webster, Schuylerville, N. Y. Photograph by Jessie F. Wheeler, Mechanicsville, N. Y. 1893 in Saratoga National Historical Park files. Photograph by E. V. Doubleday, Saratoga Springs in library of Saratoga County Historian, Saratoga Springs, N. Y.

Prepared by *F. C. Gjessing* October 1958  
F. C. Gjessing

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION (from direct observation)

### A. General Statement

1. Architectural character (original design, how much changed etc.): The house has retained the essential features of its original appearance except for a 7' wide porch which extended across the front of the house. It stands on a higher foundation and was originally about 1'-6" lower than the present building.

2. Condition of fabric (structural stability etc.):  
Well maintained by the National Park Service and open to visitors.

### B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: One story - Frame with lean-to in the rear - overall - 18 X 24.

2. Foundations: Fieldstone, dating from 1926 and higher than original foundation.

3. Wall construction: Frame nogged with baked and sundried brick in a clay mortar.

4. Porches: None. As previously mentioned, the house had a front porch.

5. Chimneys: Fieldstone chimney inside and against south wall, added in 1927.

6. Openings

- a. Doorways and doors: Doors and door trim are original. They have no ornamentation.
- b. Windows and shutters: Small pane, double-hung, old style sash, probably replacements. Two windows out of five have original frame and trim. Simple board shutters with exposed cleats.

7. Roof

- a. Shape, covering: Gable roof framed without ridgepole or ties. Sheathed with horizontal boards and shingled.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Box cornice across front and rear, added in 1927.
- c. Dormers, cupolas: None

C. Technical Description of Interiors

1. Floor Plans: First floor - Main room 17 X 16-6" is entered directly from the outside. A 12' X 6' room in leanto is entered from main room. Attic above main room.

2. Stairways: Stair to attic in southwest corner, not original.

3. Flooring: Wide unpainted pine floor boards throughout.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Main room has plastered wall, and ceiling beams were originally exposed. Room in leanto has pine board sheathing on walls and ceiling.

5. Doorways and doors: Very simple board doors with exposed cleats.

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